

# Brigantine beach-widening plan gets supportive hearing

*By JOHN BRAND Staff Writer, (609) 272-7275*

BRIGANTINE - An \$18 million project to widen the city's northern beaches could be under way by this fall, city officials said Wednesday.

Stewart Farrell, of the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey Coastal Research Center, strongly endorsed the project to the City Council during a public meeting Wednesday, saying city, state and federal governments have the finances to begin the project this year.

"The (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) right now is looking at Brigantine as a doable project because of the money they have right now," Farrell said. "If the corps committed the funding, construction could start by late fall of 2003."

The project would widen the beach from 4th Street North to either 10th Street South or 15th Street South, which has had erosion problems for several years. The project also would increase the height of sand dunes along the coast, Farrell said.

The Army Corps of Engineers, a federal entity, and the state's Department of Environmental Protection would cover most of the project's costs.

Farrell said the corps would guarantee maintenance of the proposed widening area for the next 50 years and the city would be responsible for only about 9 percent of the total cost, which would be less than \$1.8 million.

Mayor Philip J. Guenther said he has heard no opposition to the project from the council or members of the public.

"So the message to the Army Corps is: We're ready to go anytime they are," Guenther said, following Farrell's presentation.

The area in question is currently about 70 to 80 feet wide because of replenishment work the council has done, Farrell said.

In April 2001, the city brought in about 641,000 yards of sand replenishment to extend the width of its northern beaches. About a quarter of that sand was washed away due to storms between President's Day weekend and the present, Farrell said.

If the project is not pursued, the city will have to continually develop solutions to solve the erosion problem in the area, Farrell said. One solution, he said, would be to set up a pumping station and transport moving sediment to beaches on the city's north end, which could cost about \$2.2 million in start-up costs and possibly total \$6 million.

"If nothing happens with the Corps of Engineers and we have a repeat winter, you will want to set funding aside in 2004 budget to do at least another 400,000 yards of (sand replenishment)," Farrell said to the council.

The project is similar to the Absecon Island Beach Protection Project, which seeks to add sand dunes on the shores of Atlantic City, Ventnor, Margate and Longport to protect the cities' coastlines. Ventnor and Atlantic City are the only cities that have committed to the \$60 million project so far.

The governing bodies and the people of both Longport and Margate have been hesitant to commit to the

project. Residents of both cities are concerned about the sand dunes blocking their ocean view.

Farrell said the proposed project in Brigantine is more a beach-widening project than a project to add sand dunes. The dunes, however, would gain a slight height increase, he said.

"Oceanfront people won't lose the view they already have," he said. "The dunes won't be substantially larger than they already are."

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